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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a framework for examining the phenomenon of failure in student or practice teaching. The "failed" and "withdrawn" records and files of 25 student teachers over a 10-year period were analyzed. These cases represent the stories of preservice teachers who participated in teacher preparation at a large, regional research university and at a medium-sized parochial university. Particular gender, age, experiential, personal, familial, and other characteristics were evident in these individuals. The primary difficulties that the student teachers faced related to issues of classroom management, teaching effectiveness, organizational skills, communication abilities, and personal attributes. Conditions that promoted failure revolved around incongruent placements and subject problems, poor interpersonal relationships with cooperating or supervising teachers, and difficulties associated with understanding particular student or community populations. The paper maps out the massive weaknesses in knowledge of this phenomenon and suggests a course for future research. The paper concludes with 6 tables and 30 selected references. (Author/LL)

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PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS WHO "FAIL": SETTING A COURSE FOR UNDERSTANDING FAILURE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper provides a framework for examining the phenomenon of failure in student or practice teaching. An analysis of the "failed" and "withdrawn" records and files of 25 student teachers over a 10 year period was made; these cases represent the stories of preservice teachers who participated in teacher preparation programs at a large, regional, research university and at a medium-sized parochial university. Particular gender, age, experiential, personal, familial, and other characteristics were evident in these individuals. The primary difficulties that the student teachers faced related to issues of classroom management, teaching effectiveness, organizational skills, communication abilities, and "personal" attributes. Conditions that promoted "failure" revolved around incongruent placements and subject matter problems, poor interpersonal relationships with cooperating or supervising teachers, and difficulties associated with understanding particular student or community populations. The paper maps out the massive weaknesses in our knowledge of this phenomenon and suggests a course for future research.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS WHO "FAIL": SETTING A COURSE FOR UNDERSTANDING FAILURE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

This paper, which is partly autobiographical, presents exploratory analyzes of student teacher "failure." We define the boundaries and scope of the work in several ways: by delineating categories for understanding "failure" from our early, relatively naive observations of this phenomenon; by describing the demographic and circumstantial evidence surrounding two groups of preservice teachers who did not meet the requirements for provisional teacher certification; by making some preliminary conclusions about the matter of "failure;" and, by suggesting a course for future research and inquiry to add to our knowledge and understanding of this matter.

Throughout the paper we have deliberately used the terms "student or practice teacher" and "student or practice teaching." Our purpose has been to draw attention to the clumsiness of both the structure and the the intent of the practice. Are the prospective teachers "student teaching" or "practice teaching"? Is this experience a formative apprenticeship in which preservice teachers get to try on the many hats and roles of teaching with support and close supervision; or, is it a summative "acid test" of preservice teachers' abilities to teach in a polished and professional manner? Are preservice teachers judged on their potential for excellence in teaching in their placements, or solely on their observed teaching skills? Do we offer preservice teachers one or several student or practice teaching placement in which to hone their craft ? These different standards and perspectives influence the parameters by which we interpret and judge "failure" in student or practice teaching.

Just as teacher preparation programs differ and represent various philosophical and pedagogical positions, so too there is considerable diversity

among prospective teachers themselves and the schools and classroom settings into which they are placed to observe and develop their professional practice. The interactions of these characteristics, contexts, expectations, and orientations have significant bearings on the early induction of new teachers. In the midst of these various programs and settings surface individuals who do not succeed in student or practice teaching. And we, as teacher educators, have not articulated clear explanations as to why some student teachers "fail" to demonstrate classroom competence at the conclusion of their teacher preparation. This paper attempts to develop some preliminary indices of "failure" through the snapshots of individuals who were unable to fulfill their personal and professional expectations and those of their particular teacher preparation programs.

Why Study "Failure"?

Rarely do we as teacher educators talk about "failure" in our programs. In traditional undergraduate teacher preparation some measure of failure is natural and expected prior tc student or practice teaching in an attempt to screen out potentially unsuccessful or unsuitable candidates for teaching : preservice teachers fail because they have failed to pass muster academically or they have acted unprofessionally or irresponsibly in their field placements or they have changed their minds and changed their majors. Little or no stigma is attached to the preservice teacher or the teacher preparation program at these interim junctures. However, after preservice teachers pass our preliminary screenings and fall short of acceptable practice in their student or practice teaching practicums, "failure" becomes an unwelcome, unanticipated and often embarrassing outcome. Unfortunately, "failure" is never a self-contained affair. It reflects on and involves not only the teacher preparation program and the preservice teachers, but the cooperating teachers and host schools as well.

Usually teacher educators identify the central and contributing problem associated with the "failure" by couching it in terms of what the particular preservice teacher could not accomplish in the period of practice. And, sometimes, the cooperating teacher is implicated as being a contributing factor. Less frequently is responsibility attached to the teacher educator, the degree of congruity between the student or practice teacher and the school placement conditions and demands, or the preparation program itself.

Examination of "failure" in student or practice teaching provides a window on our practices. It has potential for developing insights into an area of teacher education -- student or practice teaching, and the interaction between our practices and the characteristics of student teachers themselves (c.f., Knowles, 1988; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Rathbone & Pierce, 1989) -- that is commonly seen, not only as the essential element of preparation, but as the culminating, capstone experience, the measure of success in teacher education (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Maxie, 1989; see, Tabachnich & Zeichner, 1984). Conversely, we sense that contexts and circumstances surrounding field experiences as central and integral components of preservice teacher preparation are not often considered as major contributing factors in preservice teachers' "failure" (see, Guyton & McIntyre, 1990).

Institutions' Views of "Failure"

Johnson and Yates (1982) reported that 15 percent of schools and colleges of education never fail student teachers, 50 percent failed less than one percent, and 15 percent failed one percent. Institutions have differing views of "failure"-- some implied, others formalized. But, generally, "failure" in student or practice teaching is not part of teacher educators' vocabularies. While not openly recognized as a regular and consistent outcome of student or practice teaching, "failure" is assigned by institutions in two main ways. Assessing a low or failing

grade for student or practice teaching may often seal the fate of a potential new teacher. This occurs because typical state certification requirements insist on pass rates above a C. In other cases, grades of B or less usually remove the chances of new teachers obtaining legitimate public school teaching positions; they are simply sifted from pools of applicants in tight job markets. To compound the problem, low grades carry with them weak letters of recommendation from cooperating and supervising teachers -- and their chances for obtaining a desirable classroom teaching appointment, or any position at all, are further reduced.

The first case scenario just mentioned requires institutions to play an active role; they merely do not recommend individuals for state certification. Belonging to the second group of cases virtually establishes a *fait accompli.* Our experience concurs with the position of Johnson and Yates (1982), suggesting that few institutions actually assign failing grades to preservice teachers for the field components of their course work. Although the supplemental anecdotal records of the preservice teachers whose records we examined document unsatisfactory student or practice teaching performances, their transcripts often carried grades of "no credit" or "withdrawn" for the experiences (see, Table 2b). One way institutions choose to deal with this problem is to require additional student or practice teaching assignments as a way of raising potentially damming grades. These are the grades that fall above an F but below a B; grades that would otherwise be regarded as "failure" by personnel directors of school districts and others who play central roles in new teacher hiring processes.

The two institutions primarily represented in this study take very different positions regarding "failure." The mid-sized parochial institution considers that by allocating a grade of C or lower to a preservice teacher's student or practice teaching, the implicit message is that the person has "failed." However, that

situation rarely occurs because preservice teachers are usually removed *en medias res* from difficult placements and placed in more favorable alternative sites to complete their practicum. In extreme cases, a "failing" practicum student is counseled out of the teacher education program, even as he or she prepares to graduate. The other institution, a large regional university, also awards letter grades for student or practice teaching. At the larger institution it is easier to "fail" than at the smaller institution because remedial decisions or administrative actions are slower in forthcoming and more individuals "failed" at the end of the practicum after struggling through their initial school placement. Rarely are alternative placements offered to "failed" preservice teachers. To more effectively deal with the problems surrounding others in similar circumstances, and to help our understandings, we turned to the teacher education literature.

"Failure" in the Research Literature

Numerous factors are cited as contributing to the "failure" of student or practice teachers. In this brief review we have organized the origins of problems and difficulties associated with "failure" into three clusters, and these relate to personal, professional, and contextual circumstances. In addition, we present the obvious weaknesses in the research literature pertaining to the topic.

Personal Perceptions of Self as Teacher and Patterns of Past Performance

A first group of factors relate to preservice teachers' development of a sense of self-as-teacher: role conflict or the discrepancy between the idealized role and the role demanded by the reality of the teaching situation (Knowles, 1988; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Schwab, 1989); role ambiguity associated with little sense of how they want to act or, conversely, how they do not want to act in the classroom (Knowles, 1988; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Schwab, 1989); and, personality traits not conducive to optimal teaching and classroom leadership (Knowles, 1988, in press; Knowles & Hoefler,

1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Riner & Jones, 1990). Like the following group of factors relating to professional knowledge, these are replicated in the experiences of beginning teachers whose very survival depends on their development of a resilient sense-of-self (Bullough & Knowles, 1991, Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1989, in press; Fuller & Bown, 1975; Knowles, in press, 1991; Ryan, 1986).

Patterns of past performance and personal histories suggest a subset of factors which also contribute to individuals' inabilities to successfully master classroom teaching: inconsistent levels of participation and performance in university course work (Pape & Dickens, 1990); an unwillingness to ask for help (Pape & Dickens, 1990); a lack of time and resource management associated with role overload (Goodman, 1987; Pape & Dickens, 1990; Schwab, 1989); physical or mental dysfunction (Riner & Jones, 1990); and, previous difficulties in educational settings (Knowles, 1988). As with the previous clusters of factors, these are also evident to some extent in the experience of beginning teachers.

Professional Knowledge of Curriculum and Instruction

A second cluster of factors relates to curriculum and instructional matters, and this is the area that has been given greatest attention in the relatively scant research. Emphases include: "reality shock" (Gaede, 1978) as experienced when student / practice teachers' initially confront classroom realities (Knowles, 1988, in press; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Schwab, 1989); lack of practical training (Schwab, 1989); lack of instructional skills (Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Pape & Dickens, 1990); inability to implement appropriate classroom management strategies (Knowles, 1988; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Pape & Dickens, 1990); inability to select and relate goals to objectives (Pape & Dickens, 1990); lack of awareness of available procedures, routines, and alternatives (Pape & Dickens, 1990); problems associated with developing evaluation procedures and setting

criteria for self or student performance (Pape & Dickens, 1990); inadequate image of students' characteristics and abilities (Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Pape & Dickens, 1990); and discipline problems (Knowles, 1988; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Martin, 1988; Pape & Dickens, 1990). Many, if not most, of these factors are also the same ones associated with the problems and difficulties that beginning teachers face (Bullough, 1989; Bullough & Knowles, 1990, 1991; Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1989, 1991; Ryan, 1986; Veenman, 1986).

Contextual Influences

Contextual factors make up the third group: isolation and lack of collegiality (Schwab, 1980); and, inappropriate or inaccessible immediate role models, as in the cooperating teacher (Knowles, 1988; Knowles & Hoefler, 1989; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991). In addition, lack of understanding of the institutional culture of schools (Knowles & Sudzina, 1991) as associated with one or a combination of: setting (rural, urban and inner city, or suburban); orientation (public or private); philosophy (traditional or non traditional); mismatch of grade level placement with preparation (Knowles & Sudzina, 1991); and, lack of confidence when dealing with the cognitive and social maturity levels of students (Knowles & Sudzina, 1991). These factors have been interpreted as indices of "failure." Similar factors beset beginning teachers (Bullough, 1989; Knowles, 1991, 1992).

Major Weakness in the Literature

One of the major weaknesses in the associated literature on "failure" is the lack of attention to collective programmatic actions and the consequences of particular preservice teacher education practices within institutions. It is clear, from our reading of the literature and from recollections of personal experiences with "failed" preservice teachers, that accountability for problems associated with

their "failure" rests, at least partially, on decisions about field experiences that often exclude serious consideration of domains related to school contexts, and domains related to preservice teachers' backgrounds, philosophies, and predispositions and those of their cooperating teachers.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Categories for Understanding "Failure"

From an analysis of the pertinent literature and from interpretations of early informal observations, we initially concluded that preservice teachers who "failed" during student or practice teaching displayed weaknesses or inadequacies that, if and when they could be established, provided insights into the subsequent events surrounding their particular circumstances of "failure." To guide our research we generated a list of factors that were believed were significant for understanding the failure phenomenon (see, Table 1). This taxonomy aided in making decisions about the kinds of data to collect; the categories provided the focus for the kinds of questions we asked as we reviewed the records of each individual.

Table 1 about here

Records of "Failure"

As mentioned, the data gathering was done primarily at two different university sites although a third site contributed to one of the case studies and to our general framing of the study. We examined documents, dated as early as 1980 and through 1990, from "official" and "unofficial" preservice teachers' records in these different preservice teacher education programs, focusing on those records of individuals who failed student or practice teaching or who failed to be recommended for certification. As we anticipated, there was little

consistency in the quality or quantity of the records available from the different institutions. Clearly, some institutions see a greater need to monitor preservice teachers' success, or lack of it.

First, from the "official records" we developed demographic profiles of the people who "failed" during student or practice teaching. For the most part, this process consisted of collecting data across a variety of characteristics and circumstances pertaining to the individuals -- age, gender, marital status, grade point average (GPA, overall, and for education classes), admission date, outcomes of admission interviews, the kinds of emphases made by referees about the preservice teachers in letters of recommendation, the kinds of emphases the preservice teachers made in their letters of application (or self statements) to the teacher education program, previous careers (if any), academic majors and minors (if other than education), placement school and classroom, student or practice teaching subject(s) (for secondary majors), course work load, other employment during the period, and, other pertinent data. Unfortunately, many of the above categories of data were not always available and, until more complete and uniform information about the experiences of preservice teachers is recorded by institutions, our analyses will continue to be incomplete.

Second, we constructed "collective circumstances" surrounding the "failure" experiences of the prospective teachers. This was done by summarizing formal documentation, such as formative and summative evaluations, narrative accounts of remediation efforts and circumstances of "failure", brief notations by supervisors, and, where available, pertinent information about family circumstances, extra school employment, and official letters to and from the student teachers themselves. The reconstructed records, containing numerical and text data, were systematically analyzed using simple descriptive statistics and content analysis techniques. We report on details that proved productive in

our analyses, primarily by presenting demographic profiles, collective and common circumstances of "failure", and by reporting salient examples of the kinds of experiences represented in the data.

Findings and Discussion:
Personal Characteristics and Contextual Conditions Surrounding "Failure"

The demographic profiles and selective and collective circumstances presented are based on that data which, on analysis, was most pertinent. We present cases, observations, and discussions, to illuminate both the people involved and particular, related issues facing the respective institutions. A summary concludes this section.

Demographics Profiles and Personal Characteristics

At a large, regional public university. Of the nineteen preservice teachers whose records of "failure" were available (see, Table 2a: Cases 1-19), four were in the elementary or early childhood programs and the remaining 15 were secondary or middle school prospective teachers. In reality, there were two groups of "failed" preservice teachers -- 10 who withdrew voluntarily or at the request of the university immediately before the end of student or practice teaching and nine who were "failed" by their evaluators. A comparison of the two groups was illuminating. Those who withdrew had an average age of 28 (median, 26) years and those who persisted until "failure" had an average age of 32 (median, 32) years, revealing, when compared to the average age of the total preservice teacher body, an over representation of older preservice teachers in both groups.

Gender differences between the two groups of "failed" preservice teachers were also significant. Of the group that withdrew before completing their practicum, nine were men and one was a woman. The one person who was

requested to voluntarily withdraw from their practicum was a man "very much lacking in social sophistication." Of the group that completed the practicum and "failed," there were four men and five women. Proportionately, men were over represented by those who "failed" and, within the particular contexts, were about twice as likely to "fail" as women.

There are several possible explanations for these differences. Younger prospective teachers who were men may recognize their limitations and withdraw rather than "fail" or may give up or become discouraged sooner; older men and women students of teaching may tend to be more tenacious, "sticking it out" and, subsequently, "failing." The latter case may be due to a number of reasons: older preservice teachers may perceive they have fewer alternatives for employment or further education; older individuals are also more likely to be married or have significant others and have less time available for lesson preparation and other activities associated with student or practice teaching; and, older students of teaching may get discouraged less easily and be more optimistic about their chances of eventual success.

That many of the prospective teachers were older than traditional preservice teachers and had varied life and work experiences, yet were only in their late 20s to early 30s pursuing teaching as a career, brings into question the level of their commitment to education and teaching. Some of them had tried their hand at many occupations, seemingly on a trial basis; there was little reason to believe that the opportunity to engage in student or practice teaching was anything more than trying on another coat. Given the expected maturity of older prospective teachers, many of the self statements did not present clear conceptions of teaching or of their futures, or of commitment to their professional development and the profession of teaching.

A few prospective teachers indicated that they did not know what else to do with their degrees and felt pressed to pursue teaching as the only likely avenue of employment. Some realized on entering classrooms and schools that they were ill-suited for classroom teaching. They faced the dilemma of much time invested in teacher education and no workable avenue through which to see that professional preparation through. Because of family responsibilities, a few married preservice teachers "felt compelled" to "keep trying" despite the poor fit or mismatches of abilities.

The grades of those that "failed" and those who voluntarily withdrew were located at the lower end of the performance range compared with their cohort groups (GPAs of 2.8 and 3.1 respectively). While these kinds of GPAs were respectable within the particular university they were not necessarily indicative of success within the Department(s) of Teacher Education program. Some of the "failed" preservice teachers had very low SCAT Battery test scores, even to the extent as for us to question the correctness of their records. Several of the "failed" second career preservice teachers had initially been turned down for admittance to the program due to low test scores and/or poor interpersonal skills in interviews but had appealed, tenaciously reapplied, and were accepted.

At a mid-sized private parochial university. The case records of three female undergraduate elementary and three graduate secondary preservice teachers who experienced unsatisfactory student or practice teaching placements within a two year period were examined (see, Table 2a: Cases 20-25). The average age of the undergraduate students was 21 years old; two were transfer students from other institutions. The graduate preservice teachers who had unsuccessful experiences had several things in common: they were all considerably older than their peers (mean age, 43, compared to low 30s), all possessed master's degrees,

and all were teaching on a substitute or part-time basis in urban institutions with large multicultural populations.

These instances of "failure" in the elementary undergraduate practicums are illustrated in the stories of Marisela, Connie, and Michele, individuals whose cases were pivotal in our early thinking about this study. All experienced interpersonal difficulties in getting along or being understood by others and all had conflicts with their cooperating teachers in the schools. None could be described as having dynamic or outgoing personalities, yet they were firm in their resolve and commitment to become teachers. Marisela, who came to the university as a freshman, was an excellent student; Michele, who transferred in as a sophomore, was a marginal student; Connie who transferred as a junior to a local state university after completing an associate's degree at a near-by community college appeared to be an average student.

The stories of Dinah, Winston, and Susan help us understand the frustrations and difficulties that beset the three graduate whose records we studied. Dianah, a 47 year-old divorced Hispanic woman, turned to substituting as a teacher's aid in an inner city multi-handicapped classroom as a means to support herself and her daughter. She possessed an undergraduate degree in Home Economics and a master's degree in Spanish but had been unable to find a full-time teaching position. Her teacher certification application looked like a patch-work quilt, with courses from several different local colleges and universities listed to fulfill requirements, often concurrently. She applied at one point for multi-handicapped certification because one school in which she substituted needed such a teacher.

Winston, a 46 year-old Nigerian, came to the United States after completing high school in Africa. He attended a small black college in the midwest and graduated cum laude in 1976 with a degree in accounting and earned his MBA in

1979 from a large southwestern university. For eight years he worked as a substitute teacher in local city schools, substituting over 100 days in each of the previous three years. He decided to seek certification as a secondary business and accounting teacher. Letters of recommendation mention his seriousness of intent, ability to work hard, and two degrees as evidence of his ability to successfully complete graduate studies. Not apparent from Winston's previous records were serious problems with verbal communication and his rigid, formal demeanor.

Susan, like Winston, was a poor communicator even though she concurrently taught English part-time at the local inner city community college. She had a B.A. in English and an M.A. in English Composition, both from a state college on the west coast. Thirty-seven years-old, Susan had never married and was an "excellent student" with an overall GPA of 3.85. A timid and sensitive person with a small voice, Susan's only "B" on her certification application was in a secondary English and speech methods class.

Contextual Conditions and Collective Circumstances

At a large, regional public university. Circumstances and problems which precipitated and led directly to the "failure" of student teachers (see, Table 3a & Table 3b: Cases 1-19) at the large, regional public university were primarily classroom-based. These problems were not dissimilar to those that teacher educators perceive most preservice teachers to experience, except they differed in intensity and the degree of confounding circumstances. The major problem confronting the prospective teachers was the issue of classroom management. Other concerns were related to the effectiveness of their teaching, as assessed by supervisors or cooperating teachers, and these included management issues. The next most frequent problems included, communication problems,

organizational difficulties, and, for a few individuals, family and personal dilemmas.

A common characteristic of these individuals was an "inability to evaluate and respond adequately to students' needs" either with individuals or in group settings. Classroom management and organizational problems centered on their inability to cater for the diverse needs and abilities of students and organize appropriate routines. In a few cases, outside influences beyond the scope and responsibility of the program appeared to be largely responsible for the "failure": in one case, an abusive husband; in another, severe financial problems; and another, "family problems." The oldest preservice teacher who "failed" had "serious problems accepting criticism and in dealing diplomatically and fairly with other staff members" [of the school in which the person was placed]. Inflexibility and lack of willingness to respond to new ideas may particularly confront older student teachers.

The themes evident in self-statement summaries, evaluations, and explanations of circumstances were several and general. Some preservice teachers were nervous or uneasy around students and, in some cases, around people in general. Weak interpersonal skills were commonly mentioned; words such as "inarticulate" and "poor self-expression" recurred throughout the records.

For example, Kenneth, 30 years-old at entry to the program, was rated "moderately highly" by interviewing faculty members prior to admittance. While the interviewers recognized his varied experiences and interest in children, one of them noted that his "verbal efforts were not too effective" and rated him "low" on verbal communication. The letters of recommendation pointed to a potentially good teacher, one letter even suggested that "his personality was his outstanding feature." Another letter, however, was more cautious: "While Kenneth involves

himself in classroom discussion, he seemed only to communicate well on a one to one basis." On entry to the program he maintained B grades, slightly below the mean for his peers in the program. There were no other major pointers to his difficulties mentioned in the records, except that he worked in the evenings and planned to do so through student or practice teaching.

Kenneth was rated low on all the criteria for formal and informal evaluations of his performance in the classroom:

> Although he seemed to know [very well] his subject areas, he was unable to present the material in a manner in which children could understand. He would proceed with lessons without ever assessing childrens' response to the material.

Enthusiasm was not evident in his teaching and no testing or reviewing ever took place in his classroom. He seemed afraid to engage students. In addition, he was not able to manage the class -- not unexpectedly -- and completely misinterpreted his own lack of progress. He thought he "was doing fine", considering the very few successful lessons as the norm. Kenneth's case illustrates the interrelatedness of the problems that were experienced, of which an inability to effectively communicate with groups of students was central.

Others, such as Robert, a 38 year-old father of six children, displayed well-developed interpersonal skills -- he was a very successful salesman -- when he had a captured audience. But, when unruly students no longer paid attention to his enthusiastic renderings of great literature and his professorial-like pontifications, he retreated from them and displayed all the characteristics of a person with very low self-esteem and an inability to communicate. He effectively became inarticulate.

There were also indications that the subject matter, the content of lessons, and / or preservice teachers' own teaching performances were of paramount

importance: classroom students were not the focal point of their teaching. For example, Kenneth, emulating professorial teaching, placed the greatest effort and emphasis on the form and appearance of his subject matter presentation -- formal lectures -- as opposed to evidence of students' learning and concern for their needs. He once said that he "imagined [himself] as a great orator" and indeed practiced particular passages from his lectures in front of the mirror for long periods of time.

Others, such as Kay, thought that attention to subject matter at the expense of all else "would produce competent students." As a result, and as in Kenneth's classroom, students quickly dismissed her as being not interested in them. Soon after, she lost control of the class and could not regain it because she did nothing substantial to rectify the situation. She was crippled by her sole attention to academics.

Another factor which was pervasive in the records was a lack of lesson preparation, evidenced by the unrealistic expectations most of the prospective teachers had for what classroom teaching would be like. Such comments included: "naive about teaching," "poor preparation," "disorganized," "poor classroom control." Almost all the cooperating teachers and university evaluators whose reports were on file had these kinds of complaints. In many cases the pressure of working another job (in one case, two jobs) in addition to family responsibilities proved too great. Most preservice teachers clearly did not anticipate the lengthy period of daily and weekly preparation required to teach large groups of school students. Having made little preparation for lessons in advance meant that the prospective teachers "were flying by the seat of their pants," and impromptu performances quickly led to serious breakdowns in classroom management.

Offensive attitudes -- at least as interpreted by students -- were also noted in the practices of prospective teachers. These tended to accompany individuals whose classroom management was nonexistent and whose views of students were derogatory. This was particularly evident in persons who imagined they knew everything about students. For example, in an effort to assert his authority over students, Max assumed the posture he had learned as as an Army drill sergeant.

Many of the older preservice teachers in particular had serious difficulties with the school contexts in which they were placed. This was especially so among the men who thought they were entering teaching "to save the kids and the world." For example, Mike, an experienced writer and sometime columnist had serious difficulties with the philosophy of the cooperating teacher and, indeed, of the school. He made efforts to contradict some of the stated perspectives of the cooperating teacher and subversively thwart her actions, thinking that he was doing the "morally correct thing." While this was an extreme case, serious discontinuities between cooperating teachers and preservice teachers may well have put the prospective new teachers at serious disadvantages -- and those disadvantages were not corrected.

The ratios of "failed" preservice teachers who were men to those who were women were two to one in the secondary program; each gender had an equal distribution of "failure" in the elementary program. Men appeared to be less inclined to respond to their perceived weaknesses or perhaps were not even aware of them until tested during student or practice teaching. Prospective teachers who were men tended to experience more conflicts associated with their subordinate relationships with cooperating teachers and their understandings of the context of schools. In addition, men made more vocal and vehement

oppositions to their recorded or prospective "failures" despite compelling prior evidence suggesting they were poorly-suited to classroom teaching.

Poor interpersonal skills, lack of primary focus on students, lack of commitment and attention to lesson preparation, and most universally, poor classroom management and general preparation for the school placement were powerful indicators of "failure." In addition, unrealistic expectations for the classroom experience contributed to the demise of several prospective teachers in these records.

At a mid-sized private parochial university. The cases of the younger preservice teachers who were unsuccessful in their practica (see, Table 3b: Cases 20, 24-25), were very similar. All were female elementary education majors with shy or retiring personalities; all were at risk of "failing" because they were unable to assert themselves in their classrooms. While most preservice teachers adapt and persevere in their placements, these three preservice teachers were unable to adjust to their classroom situations and were overwhelmed by energetic cooperating teachers who were seen by other professionals as excellent practitioners and teacher role models. Their initial cooperating teachers did not view them as "teacher material." These young women seemed to need nurturing mentors, different grade level placements, and alternative school settings to ultimately succeed in their student or practice teaching.

Marisela and Michele (see, Table 3b: Cases 24-25) were both removed from their initial placements by the university supervisor within the first few weeks after unsatisfactory evaluations. In Marisela's case, a lack of understanding of the school culture and the personal, social and academic needs of wordly-wise urban fifth graders in a local public school overwhelmed her. A petite Asian-American, and a graduate of private parochial schooling, Marisela couldn't understand why these students were so "rude." She was unable to assert herself,

take control of the classroom or interpret content knowledge for these students. In a second suburban placement with much younger conforming students, Marisela was able to express herself creatively with multiple hands-on and story-telling activities and delighted both her students and her cooperating teacher.

Almost the reverse was true of Michele. Placed with younger children in a very traditional parochial elementary school, Michele was placed with an upbeat but rigid cooperating teacher who was very intolerant of incompetence. She expected Michele to follow her approach and Michele was unable to comply. Her first university supervisor assessed her teaching as a being low quality and Michele appealed her grade. In a second placement with fourth graders and a new supervisor, Michele fared better but still fell short of being recommended for certification. In a third placement with still older elementary children and a hand-picked nurturing cooperating teacher, Michele seemed to hit her stride. For her, multiple placements eventually spelled student or practice teaching success.

Connie (see, Table 3b: Case 20), at a large state university, was not as fortunate and struggled for the fifteen weeks of her undergraduate practicum before failing to be recommended for certification. Connie was very unlike her bubbly, creative, and flexible cooperating teacher and they saw eye to eye on practically nothing. Her college supervisor was very sympathetic and offered Connie a second kindergarten placement but she was "too burned out" emotionally and financially to repeat the experience. Connie fared slightly better in her elementary placement and was recommended for certification but, as she was still operating on a survival level in her practicum, she never fully developed those skills necessary to excel in the classroom.

All three of the graduate preservice teachers (see, Table 3b: Cases 21-23) were stunned by evaluations of their inadequacy in their practica. Because they

had all recently taught in some capacity -- as substitute teachers or a part-time instructors -- they thought that teaching was something that they could do and that they knew how to do. The fact that they all possessed master's degrees and had not been able to attain employment in their initial areas of expertise suggests that they turned to teaching after exhausting other possibilities. As mid-life career changers they were in the precarious position of needing to succeed, and not being able to change deeply ingrained interpersonal and behavioral characteristics; especially ways of communicating and thinking that were adequate for temporary teaching employment but not sufficient or desirable in a permanent teacher. Two individuals chose secondary education as a way to parlay their graduate degrees into a particular certification area; the other graduate student chose her certification area according to reported job openings. All of these individuals eventually gained teacher certification upon the completion of their studies.

Dianah, for example, had a stubborn and determined personality and did not endear herself to others. Her interpersonal skills could best be described as abrasive and manipulative. She did not to trust the criteria or the system by which preservice teachers were certified. She regularly sought to have rules bent for her purposes and was very defensive. Her "pushy posture created ripples wherever she went."

Dianah's student or practice teaching placements were split between a vocational and an alternative school and she taught in a secondary developmentally handicapped classroom. Although her supervising teacher wrote volumes on Dianah's "need to actively work with groups and with students on specific practical applications," such as employment related skills and personal-social skills, Dianah persisted in tutoring one-on-one and writing generalized lesson plans that "lacked specific objectives, activities and

developmental sequence." Frustrated with Dianah's lack of responsiveness to specific suggestions for improvement and the lack of input by her cooperating teachers, the university supervisor extended her practicum until she mastered and demonstrated appropriate skills. At the conclusion of the practicum, Dianah's cooperating teachers deemed her as "satisfactory" and gave her an A while her university supervisor gave her a B, a grade Dianah bitterly contested. Dianah's supervising teacher commented: "If Dianah had put forth half as much effort into improving her work as she did trying to get around doing the work, she could have had a very successful experience."

Winston received a "failing" grade after his first ten week practicum and was not recommended by his cooperating and supervising teachers for a career in teaching. Winston's appeal for a revised grade was denied and he chose to complete another practicum in an inner city high school. At the end of his second placement, he earned a B- grade, still "needing improvement in verbal articulation, voice projection, modulation in rate of speaking, expression of enthusiasm." Although Winston was "a very hard and serious worker," his stoic personality, his difficulty with expressing himself clearly to students and giving them appropriate feedback and directions were problematic in his teaching. The second time round his tenaciousness and hard work paid off with a minimal passing grade in student or practice teaching but did not remediate perceived weaknesses in his personality and communication style for teaching.

Susan's first placement as an English teacher with two cooperating teachers in a suburban public high school was a disaster. After four weeks, the assistant principal sent a two page letter to the university supervisor outlining Susan's considerable difficulties with classroom control, lesson organization and presentation, and discipline.

Susan was removed from the first school placement and put in a small private parochial high school with a "sensitive, conscientious" mentor who "devoted many hours to making her student teaching experience effective." Although Susan's difficulties were not alleviated -- she remained timid and uncomfortable conducting class discussions and had difficulty with classroom discipline -- she showed marked improvement over the six week period. Susan's cooperating teacher found her eager to learn and develop skills, sensitive to student writing, conscientious, and good at one-to-one consultation. At the conclusion of the second practicum, Susan received a B for her efforts, typical of the outcomes at this institution where individuals are often given multiple placements to improve their "failed" grades.

Poor personal interaction skills with supervisors and students, lack of enthusiasm for and interpretation of content knowledge for students, and poor classroom management skills were universally problematic for these preservice teachers who experienced "failure" in their practica at this mid-sized parochial teacher preparation institution.

Summary and Conclusions

Age and gender distinction appear significant in the "failed" student or practice teachers at the two institutions. Older male elementary and secondary preservice teachers were over represented in the large public institution. At the private institution, the "failed" undergraduate preservice teachers tended to be young women, while "failed" graduate preservice teachers were older individuals making mid-career changes. More older, male, second-career preservice teachers "failed" at the large, regional public university than at the small parochial university, perhaps also partially a reflection of the gender differences in enrollments at each institution. Preservice teachers in the smaller institution

who at first "failed" were given additional opportunities to successfully complete their practica – and all were eventually certified.

In both settings, lower overall GPAs than those of their cohorts were evident, and low results on standardized tests were indicative of potential problems. Poor interpersonal skills, inabilies to respond adequately to pupils' needs, weak interpretation of content, and inadequate planning and organizational skills were cited in the records of many of these preservice teachers. Poor classroom management was seen as the obvious weakness by cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

Not substantially addressed in the records, but significant in many cases, were the contextual circumstances in which these "failed" student or practice teachers found themselves. Many appeared, so the records suggested, to be "fish out of water" in their grade level placements and school settings. And, these placements were often very different from that which the individuals expected. Preservice teachers' internalized visions of classrooms, based on prior experiences and the programmatic emphases and experiences immediately prior to the period of practice, often did not constructively match the realities of assigned tasks and classrooms.

Mismatches with school placements, as indicated by serious and dysfunctional difficulties and conflicts associated with cooperating teachers' styles, methods, and philosophies, proved fatal to some preservice teachers. Weak or even negative interactions between preservice teachers and students affected other individuals. Inappropriate grade level placements -- supposedly too high or too low -- were problematic for some elementary preservice teachers. Often, in the records, negative interactions were couched in the language of poor classroom management, deficient organizational skills, or weak understandings of content.

In a sense, the phenomenon of student or practice teacher "failure" can be reduced to mismatch of models among the key players and contexts, that is between the student or practice teacher and: previous school experiences and expectations as they influence internal images of good teaching; the teacher education program; and, the cooperating teacher and school community. None of these factors in and of themselves explain "failure" but, taken in context and together, they provide pictures of emerging patterns of the antecedents of "failure": at a personal level, issues and factors are identified through the observation of dispositions and attributes of preservice teachers and the monitoring of their academic performance; at a program level, factors are evident in the results and impact of course work and practicum experiences, and the more general impact of models of preservice teacher preparation; and, at a field placement or school context level, factors are influenced by the settings and styles of the cooperating schools and teachers, including the influences of supervisors and other mentors.

Rethinking Models of Practice

While others have explored the pitfalls and advantages of student or practice teaching (e.g., Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1986) and have brought into question its value and assumptions about its structure, we believe it is important to attend to the matter further. We are not convinced that it serves well the preparation for practice of many individuals. We noted several cases where the context, duration, focus, and intensity of the experience was most mis-educative. Further, student or practice teaching is traditionally thought of as a capstone experience, a view which needs to be broadened and integrated to include other experiences important in the process of learning to teach. To have one's prospective professional success rest on <u>one</u> kind of experience is not ultimately helpful for the development of exemplary practices. Notions of

prospective teachers being guided by only one cooperating teacher through singular placements could give way to multiple placements over shorter durations and over the entire course of one's preparation program. We also suggest several other modifications to current teacher preparation practices including: more selective admission criteria; more humane and appropriate career guidance; early remedial activities or direct exit counseling; enhanced and more intensive supervision of student teachers; and responsible placements with cooperating teachers in appropriate contexts (Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; 1992). These are not new recommendations but, indeed, if teachers of tomorrow are to be prepared to meet the multiple demands of complex and depressed urban environments, and the variety of other contexts found in a culturally pluralistic society, then extensive opportunities for teaching in other than the most traditional school settings is in order.

Finally, the scant attention to the matter of "failure" in the research literature verifies the need for more research on the matter. This effort has been productive and has allowed us relatively translucent windows to our own practices. In particular, understandings about the antecedents of "failure" (see Table 1), and ways to remedy the various situations, are sorely needed. We have barely scratched the surface.

Table 1: Categories for Understanding "Failure": Preliminaries to Method

1. Personal history-based characteristics
   - i. Patterns of social interactions and personality
     - Personal interaction skills with professors and others
     - Social habits and acceptance by peers
   - ii. Academic history
     - Standardized testing
     - Academic grade point average
     - Work habits / academic responsibility
   - iii. Knowledge of self as teacher
     - Previous role models of teaching
     - Familiarity with expectations of teachers
     - Degree of comfort working in schools
2. Proficiency at expected teaching / professional practices
   - i. Scope of content area knowledge preparation
     - Mastery of content area knowledge
     - Interpretation of content knowledge for students
     - Enthusiasm for content knowledge
   - ii. Curriculum and planning skills
     - Clear lesson plans and objectives
     - Organization and planning skills
     - Uses variety of curriculum methods
     - Consideration of students' developmental needs
   - iii. Classroom management and discipline
3. Externally imposed factors
   - i. Personal circumstances
     - Marital / relational pressures
     - Financial needs
     - Occupational interference
     - Health problems
   - ii. Student / practice teaching contexts
     - Interactions with university supervisor
     - Interactions with cooperating teacher
     - Interactions with students
     - Incongruent subject matter / grade level placement
     - Practicum attendance and professional conduct
     - Adjustment to school setting / culture

Table 2a: Cases of "Failure" in Student / Practice Teaching Practica

	Date of Initial Failure	Age at Entry of Program	Gender	Undergraduate or Graduate Program	Major Certification Area	Grade Point Average	Initial Evaluation
Case 1	1981	25	M	U-sec	SOCIOLOGY	2.68	U
Case 2	1981	22	F	U-sec	HEALTH ED	2.74	U
Case 3	1981	29	M	U-sec	ENGLISH	2.8	U
Case 4	1982	25	F	U-sec	ENGLISH	2.72	U
Case 5	1982	31	F	U-sec	P. E.	2.81	S/U
Case 6	1982	25	M	U-sec	HISTORY	2.93	U
Case 7	1982	31	M	U-sec	ENGLISH	2.78	U
Case 8	1983	33	F	U-sec	FRENCH	2.81	U
Case 9	1985	37	M	U-sec	HISTORY	3.39	U
Case 10	1985	35	M	U-sec	SPANISH	3.23	U
Case 11	1986	32	M	U-elem	EARLY CHILDHOOD	2.03	U
Case 12	1986	28	F	U-sec	HOME EC	2.69	U
Case 13	1986	22	M	U-sec	HISTORY	3.67	U
Case 14	1987	46	F	U-elem	ELEM ED	3.19	U
Case 15	1987	37	M	U-sec	HISTORY	3.21	U
Case 16	1987	38	M	G-sec	ENGLISH	3.62	S
Case 17	1987	24	M	U-middle	COMMUNICATION	2.78	U/S
Case 18	1987	24	M	U-elem	ELEM ED	3.33	N.A.
Case 19	1988	30	M	U-elem	ELEM ED	2.91	U
Case 20	1984	23	F	U-elem	EARLY CHILDHOOD	3.2	U
Case 21	1989	37	F	G-sec	ENGLISH	3.85	U
Case 22	1989	46	M	G-sec	BUS ED	3.53	D
Case 23	1990	47	F	G -K-12	MULTI HANDICAPPED	n.a.	U
Case 24	1990	20	F	U-elem	ELEM ED	3.81	U
Case 25	1990	20	F	U-elem	ELEM ED	2.54	U

U-elem	undergraduate elementary
U-sec	undergraduate secondary
G-sec	graduate secondary
U	unsatisfactory
S	satisfactory

Table 2b: Cases of "Failure" in Student / Practice Teaching Practica

	Offered Another Placement	Completed Alternate Placement	Grade Appeal	Final Practicum Grade	Marital Status	Previous Occupation
Case 1	N	NO	NO	W	M	Religious worker
Case 2	N	NO	YES	W	S	Transfer student
Case 3	N	NO	NO	W	N.A.	Aluminum siding installer
Case 4	Y	NO	NO	INC	N.A.	Work 20 hours per week
Case 5	Y	NO	NO	INC	S	Substitute teacher - 6 years
Case 6	N	NO	NO	NO CREDIT	N.A.	Housekeeper at hospital
Case 7	N	NO	YES	NO CREDIT	M	Construction worker
Case 8	Y	YES	NO	NO CREDIT	M	N.A.
Case 9	N	NO	YES	NO CREDIT	M	Substitute teacher
Case 10	N	NO	NO	W	N.A.	Substitute teacher - 1 year
Case 11	Y	NO	NO	NO CREDIT	N.A.	Teacher's aide
Case 12	N	NO	YES	NO CREDIT	M	Housewife/mother
Case 13	N	NO	YES	W	N.A.	Cashier at grocery store
Case 14	N	NO	NO	NO CREDIT	N.A.	Housewife/mother
Case 15	N	NO	NO	W	N.A.	Marines; Boy Scout leader
Case 16	N	NO	NO	W	M	Salesman (father of 6)
Case 17	N	NO	NO	W	N.A.	Boy Scout leader; religious worker
Case 18	N	NO	NO	W	M	Transfer student
Case 19	N	NO	NO	NO CREDIT	N.A.	N.A.
Case 20	Y	NO	NO	B	S	Transfer student; rental sales
Case 21	Y	YES	NO	B*	S	Part-time teacher
Case 22	Y	YES	YES	B*	N.A.	Substitute teacher
Case 23	N	1ST EXTEND	YES	B*	DIVORCED	Substitute teacher
Case 24	Y	YES	NO	A*	S	Student
Case 25	Y	YES(2)	YES	A*	S	Transfer student

* recommended for certification
W withdrawn
INC incomplete
N.A. data not available

Table 3a: Cases of "Failure" in Student / Practice Teaching

Deficiencies noted in anecdotal records and student / practice teaching evaluations

CIRCUMSTANCES		CASES 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
PERSONAL											
Personal interaction skills with professors and others	A										√
Social habits and acceptance by peers	B						√				
Standardized testing	C	√				√			√		
Academic grade point average	D	√						√			√
Work habits / academic responsibility	E	√						√		√	√
Previous role models of teaching	F	√	√	√		√				√	
Familiarity with expectations of teachers	G				√			√			√
Degree of comfort working in schools	H				√		√			√	
PROFESSIONAL											
Mastery of content area knowledge	I			√							
Interpretation of content knowledge	J		√			√	√		√	√	
Enthusiasm for content knowledge	K			√					√		
Clear lesson plans and objectives	L	√	√	√	√				√		
Organization and curriculum planning skills	M	√	√	√	√	√			√		
Uses variety of curriculum methods	N						√		√	√	
Classroom management and discipline	O	√	√	√	√		√		√	√	
CONTEXTUAL											
Marital / relational pressures	P				√				√		
Financial needs	Q				√			√	√		
Occupational interference	R				√			√			
Health problems	S								√		
Interactions with university supervisor	T		√								
Interactions with cooperating teacher	U		√	√				√			√
Interactions with students	V			√		√	√				
Incongruent subject matter / grade level placement	W										
Practicum attendance and professional conduct	X		√	√		√		√			√
Adjustment to school setting / culture	Y										

Table 3b: Cases of "Failure" in Student / Practice Teaching

Deficiencies noted in anecdotal records and student / practice teaching evaluations

CIRCUMSTANCES	CASES														
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
PERSONAL															
A		√	√	√			√	√		√	√		√		√
B			√					√		√		√	√	√	
C	√	√													
D	√	√						√				√			√
E	√	√						√					√		√
F			√		√					√			√		
G				√	√	√		√	√	√					
H			√								√			√	
PROFESSIONAL															
I									√	√	√	√	√		
J	√		√	√			√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√
K	√		√					√	√	√	√	√			√
L	√	√			√	√			√	√	√	√	√		
M	√	√		√	√	√			√	√	√	√	√		
N									√	√	√	√			
O	√		√	√		√			√	√	√	√		√	√
CONTEXTUAL															
P		√													
Q					√			√		√			√		
R					√										
S															
T			√				√						√		
U			√	√						√	√			√	√
V	√			√						√	√	√		√	√
W			√	√						√				√	√
X		√							√	√					
Y								√						√	√

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